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Alaska National Guard aids local community in statewide disaster exercise

CORDOVA, Alaska — Members of Alpha Troop, 1st Battalion, 297th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance Squadron) assisted the community of Cordova during the linked exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014. The purpose of the exercise was to test emergency response services in place around the state, including the Alaska Army National Guard.

This exercise was particularly meaningful to Alaskan communities as this year marks the 50th anniversary of the "Good Friday" 1964 earthquake.

Vigilant Guard-Alaska is a statewide exercise, simulating an earthquake with subsequent tsunami disasters. The Soldiers partnered with other emergency response efforts to aid community members in a multitude of missions.

"It is so important that we practice these scenarios. It allows us to identify the shortages in the areas of planning and communication and then we can adjust accordingly," said Chris Dunlap, shelter manager for the American Red Cross.

Guardsmen took on several tasks ranging from setting up a temporary shelter, searching and recovering casualties from the harbor, responding to riots at the hospital and assisting with a general point of distribution for fresh water.

"After multiple years of deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq, this is a great chance for Soldiers to reintegrate back into the community. Exercises like this allow for Soldiers to reconnect with the civilian populace that we were recruited from and where we live. It gives us a chance to get back to our roots," said Col. Chad Parker, 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade Commander.

The National Guard is the nation's first military responder to domestic emergencies. Working with state, federal and interagency partners, Guardsmen work to save lives, protect communities and infrastructure, and support recovery efforts.

"This provides a great learning opportunity for Soldiers to use their military skill sets and translate them into the local populace in a time of need," said Parker.

Vigilant Guard began March 25 and ends tomorrow in the communities of Anchorage, Matanuska Valley, Valdez, Fairbanks, Cordova and Kodiak.

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Photo cutlines follow

Photo cutlines

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Members of Alpha Troop, 1st Battalion, 297th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance Squadron) assist the American Red Cross in setting up a temporary shelter in Cordova, Alaska. Alaska Army National Guard members participated in Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014 which simulated an earthquake and subsequent tsunami and tested emergency response efforts and preparedness around the state. The exercise also marks the 50th anniversary of the 1964 earthquake. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Sara A. Marchus

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Members of the Alaska Army National Guard's Alpha Troop, 1st Battalion, 297th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance Squadron) respond to rioting during Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014. The Soldiers patrolled the streets keeping the community orderly and safe. The exercise simulated an earthquake and subsequent tsunamis and tested emergency response efforts and preparedness around the state. The exercise also marks the 50th anniversary of the 1964 earthquake. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Sara A. Marchus

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Cordova local, Dick Groff, provides instructions to 2nd Lt. Thomas Howard during Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014 in Cordova, Alaska. This statewide exercise simulated an earthquake and subsequent tsunamis. The purpose of the exercise was to test the emergency response services in place around the state. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Sara A. Marchus